

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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TAGS: MILI, GW, NATO, PFOR

SUBJECT: LEBER PRESS INTERVIEW

1. SUMMARY

IN AN INTERVIEW WITH DIE WELT JULY 22, FRG DEFENSE MINISTER LEBER REVIEWED SEVERAL DEFENSE TOPICS, INCLUDING THE BUNDESWEHR REORGANIZATION PROPOSAL, NATO STRATEGY, ADM'S, TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS, A EUROPEAN NUCLEAR FORCE, AND THE US-SOVIET NUCLEAR AGREEMENT. WHILE LEBER DID NOT COVER MUCH NEW GROUND IN HIS INTERVIEW, HE SUMMARIZED HIS VIEWS ON A NUMBER OF MATTERS OF CURRENT INTEREST. END SUMMARY.

2. LEBER SAID HE HOPED TO PRESENT TO THE FEDERAL CABINET

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PROPOSALS FOR REORGANIZAING THE BUNDESWEHR BY ABOUT THE END OF

OCTOBER. THIS WOULD HOPEFULLY ENABLE THE GOVERNMENT TO REACH A MORE OR LESS FIRM DECISION ON THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF THE BUNDESWEHR IN THE COURSE OF 1973 AND WOULD ALLOW THE PARLIAMENT SUFFICIENT TIME TO REVIEW THE MATTER WITHOUT INJECTING THE ISSUE INTO THE 1976 ELECTIONS. MEANWHILE HIS APPROACH WAS GUIDED BY THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES. THE FRG DEFENSE STRUCTURE CANNOT BE CHANGED UNILATERALLY, AND MUST BE COORDINATED WITHIN THE ALLIANCE. THE BUNDESWEHR'S STRENGTH CANNOT BE REDUCED IN VIEW OF THE FRG'S NATO COMMITMENTS. FRG SECURITY DEPENDS ON THE STRENGTH OF ITS STANDING FORCES AND NOT ON A COMBAT FORCE THAT WOULD ONLY BE AVAILABLE WITHIN A 90 DAY PERIOD.

3. STRATEGY: ON NATO STRATEGY, LEBER STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING A HIGH STATE OF COMBAT CAPABILITY OF WESTERN FORCES. IT WAS NOT ENOUGH, HE SAID, JUST TO CONFRONT AN AGGRESSOR WITH SUFFICIENT MILITARY FORCE TO SHOW THERE WAS NO CHANCE OF AN EASY VICTORY; IN ADDITION, NATO STRATEGY SHOULD LEAVE THE POTENTIAL OPPONENT IN DOUBT ABOUT WHAT WEAPONS, CONVENTIONAL OR NUCLEAR, THE ALLIANCE WOULD USE TO DEFEND ITSELF. LEBER STATED: "IF THE UNITY OF CONVENTIONAL AND NUCLEAR STRENGTH IS DESTROYED, THEN OUR WHOLE STRATEGIC CONCEPT IS NO LONGER CREDIBLE." MOREOVER, AN OPPONENT SHOULD UNDERSTAND THE CONNECTION BETWEEN AMERICAN STRATEGIC NUCLEAR WEAPONS LOCATED IN THE US WITH THOSE IN EUROPE; THE LINE DIVIDING THEIR USE SHOULD NOT BE A FIXED ONE.

4. US-SOVIET NUCLEAR AGREEMENT: ASKED WHETHER HE RECEIVED ASSURANCES DURING HIS VISIT TO THE US THAT THE US-SOVIET AGREEMENT TO PREVENT NUCLEAR WAR WOULD BE INVALID IN THE EVENT OF WAR IN EUROPE, LEBER RESPONDED: "IF THE US HAD NOT EXPLAINED THIS IN A CREDIBLE WAY AND WE STILL HAD DOUBTS ABOUT THE MATTER, THEN I WOULD HAVE HAD TO SUMMON THE COURAGE TO TELL NOT ONLY THE AMERICANS, BUT THE GERMAN PEOPLE AS WELL, THAT UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES THE ALLIANCE WAS NOT OF MUCH VALUE ANYMORE."

5. SALT: IN HIS VIEW, ALLIANCE STRATEGY CANNOT BE EFFECTED BY THE SALT NEGOTIATIONS. THESE TALKS AIM AT LIMITING STRATEGIC NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND HALTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW WEAPONS BY BOTH SIDES. THEY SEEK TO STABILIZE A STALEMATE; FURTHER ADVANCES WITH CURRENT TECHNOLOGY WOULD ALLOW ONE SIDE TO ENJOY SUPERIORITY FOR ONLY A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME.

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6. ADM: LEBER SAID THE FRG'S VIEW ON ADM'S REMAINS UNCHANGED. IT WOULD NOT BE PRACTICAL TO IMPLACE SUCH WEAPONS IN PEACETIME, PARTICULARLY BECAUSE OF THE UNEASINESS SUCH A STEP WOULD CAUSE THE GERMAN POPULATION. HE STATED: "WE DO NOT KNOW WHETHER THESE WEAPONS WOULD IN FACT BE LOCATED WHERE WE WOULD NEED THEM IF WAR CAME. I COULD NOT IMAGINE THEM BEING LOCATED IN HEAVILY POPULATED AREAS, ONLY IN UNINHABITED PLACES. FURTHERMORE, THE FIRST USE OF

NUCLEAR WEAPONS WOULD MEAN A CHANGE IN THE KIND OF WAR BEING FOUGHT, AND ONE SHOULD REALLY NOT DRAW IMPORTANT DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN THE VARIOUS KINDS OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS." (COMMENT: SOURCES IN THE DEFENSE MINISTRY TOLD US THAT LEBER'S STATEMENT ON ADM'S HAD NOT BEEN STAFFED AND DID NOT TAKE FULLY INTO ACCOUNT THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL PROBLEMS ADM'S WOULD CAUSE A GERMAN GOVERNMENT.)

7. TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS: ASKED ABOUT MINI-NIKES, LEBER SAID THAT THE US IS NOT THINKING ABOUT EQUIPPING ITS TROOPS WITH THESE WEAPONS. HE SAID: "THE USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS, NO MATTER HOW SMALL OR CLEAN THEY MAY BE, WOULD LEAD TO A NEW PHASE OF WAR ONCE THE NUCLEAR THRESHOLD WERE CROSSED. THIS WOULD CAUSE A MORE DESTRUCTIVE WAR, ONE WHICH WOULD BE EVEN MORE DIFFICULT TO CONTROL. ESCALATION TO THE LARGER, MORE DESTRUCTIVE NUCLEAR WEAPONS WOULD BE SPEEDED." LEBER WENT ON TO SAY HE COULD NOT IMAGINE REPLACING CONVENTIONAL FORCES WITH NUCLEAR WEAPONS. SUCH A STEP WOULD NOT BE IN THE INTEREST OF THE NUCLEAR POWERS. THEY WANT TO MAINTAIN THE CREDIBILITY OF THEIR NUCLEAR FORCES, BUT IT IS ALSO IN THEIR INTEREST TO MAINTAIN STRONG CONVENTIONAL FORCES. LEBER THOUGHT THAT EVEN THE USE OF A "SINGLE ATOMIC HAND GRANADE" WOULD CAUSE ESCALATION TO THE MOST POWERFUL NUCLEAR WEAPONS.

8. EUROPEAN NUCLEAR FORCE: LEBER LABELLED RECENT SPECULATION ABOUT THE FORMATION OF A EUROPEAN NUCLEAR FORCE AS AN ILLUSION. HE COULD NOT IMAGINE SUCH A DEVELOPMENT BEFORE EUROPEAN POLITICAL UNIFICATION, WHICH WOULD MAKE POSSIBLE ORGANIZING A MILITARY COMMAND UNDER POLITICAL CONTROL. HE POINTED OUT, HOWEVER, THAT TWO EUROPEAN POWERS POSSESS NUCLEAR WEAPONS, AND THOUGHT THAT EUROPE WOULD HAVE TO CONSIDER HOW TO ORGANIZE ITS DEFENSES IF UNIFICATION WERE EVENTUALLY ACHIEVED. THEN THE QUESTION OF DEFENSE WOULD INCLUDE NUCLEAR WEAPONS.
HILLENBRAND

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